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BERNARDO SEPULVEDA'S 'MEXICAN FOREIGN POLICY: RECENT DEVELOPMEN--ETC(U)
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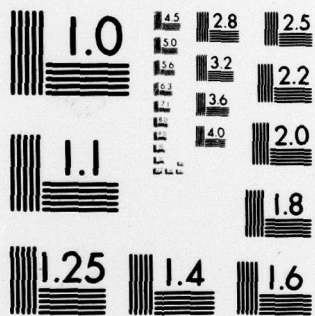
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⑥ Comments by Karl M. Schmitt on

Bernardo Sepulveda's 'Mexican Foreign Policy: Recent Developments'

⑩ Karl M. Schmitt

Professor Sepulveda has well outlined Mexico's foreign policy principles and guidelines, both traditional positions and innovative departures of recent years. As I understand his paper, the traditional positions include the strengthening of national independence, the search for world peace, and the maintenance of friendly ties with all nations. Recent innovations include a more active world role, greater cooperation with Latin America and other parts of the Third World, efforts to improve Mexico's terms of trade through SELA and the charter on the Economic Rights and Duties of States, and a series of new laws to control foreign investments and Technology Transfers.

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No one can deny the utility of these propositions as general goals. However, specific and concrete interpretation and implementation of generalized goals pose severe problems to all governments, including Mexico, because in the harsh reality of everyday life, policies to implement the goals clash with other values of government leaders, or they arouse powerful negative responses from opponents of the regime within the country or from the leaders of neighboring states.

Let me cite some examples. Mexico wishes to strengthen its national independence by decreasing its economic dependence on the United States by diversifying its markets and sources of capital. But how is this to be done? With two thirds of its trade with the United States, only some 5% with Latin America, and most of the rest with industrialized Western Europe and Japan, what are the real opportunities? Some observers argue that the border industries, tourism, and the bracero migration simply intensify dependence. Would any Mexican government seriously consider reducing or eliminating the sources of employment and hard currency? Not very likely when one considers the immediate human costs as well as the consequences for continued economic development, a primary goal of all sectors of society.

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What is the official Mexican position on the question of the U.S. supplying training and equipment for military and police forces in Latin America? Many Mexicans voiced their opposition to US cooperation with the authorities in Uruguay in suppressing the Tupamaros. But Mexico this very moment is cooperating with the U.S. in joint police and army activities in suppressing the drug traffic in northern Mexico. A recent AP dispatch noted that the US had poured some \$40 million into the project and had given Mexico "28 new Bell Helicopters, 15 light fixed-wing aircraft and an executive jet plus all the fuel and training the Mexicans need to carry out their mission." The report also noted that US Vietnam veterans were flying some of the helicopters under contract to spray poppy fields with a defoliant.

[For many years Mexican governments have condemned US troops interventions in other countries even when invited in by one faction or another. What is the Mexican position vis-a-vis the use of Cuban troops in Angola?]*

Mexico supports world peace. Will Mexico supply troops to patrol neutral areas in war-torn parts of the world to help preserve peace, for example, on the Golan Heights or in Cyprus?

How useful are SELA and the Charter on the Economic Rights and Duties of States? Will they change the terms of trade, will they produce trade preferences for less developed countries? They seem to me to be largely symbolic gestures and I wonder whether their primary utility is for domestic political consumption rather than international impact.

What concrete benefits does Mexico expect to reap from President Echeverria's recent trip around the world? Publicity? Image? But, for what purpose, and at what cost?

At his last stop on this trip (in Cuba), the President said that the Cuban Revolution was the only true maker of Cuban independence and freedom from foreign domination. He also said that geography should not determine all other relationships among states. What does that mean if anything in terms of Mexico's relations with

the US? Was it just friendly rhetoric and another symbolic gesture against dependence?

At one point in his paper, Professor Sepulveda notes that Mexico supports political democracy in the world. What does that mean concretely? Would any Mexican government consider withholding diplomatic relations from a dictatorial or military regime? Not likely, given Mexicans' commitment to the Estrada Doctrine.

[And finally to end this series of rhetorical questions, what was the purpose of Mexico's vote in the U.N. last fall that supported the resolution that Zionism constituted racism? It too seemed a gesture, a gesture of support for the Third World and an indication of independence from the US position. Aside from any moral question, that vote appears to have been extremely costly in both economic and political terms. The balance of payments suffered by a serious drop in tourism and the Secretary of Foreign Relations was forced to resign.]*

My analysis of Mexican foreign policy from the 1930's onward is that it has been marked by an enormous pragmatism accompanied by a continuing flow of rhetoric and symbolism that attempt to prove unswerving adherence to the principles of the Revolution. I find many of the so called new departures and innovations largely symbolic.

Let me give some examples of Mexico's pragmatism.

1. The petroleum industry was expropriated in 1938, but payment was made, but not too much.
2. Mexico further mollified the US by joining WWII in 1942, but dispatched only an air wing to combat, and that only in 1945 toward the very end of the war.
3. After WW II the several governments in office decided that Mexico needed foreign capital for development, and invited in it, but with restrictions from the very beginning, restrictions that mollified potential political opposition within Mexico.

4. As the economy strengthened and opposition to foreign investments grew, the rules were tightened, but gradually and always clearly so as not to frighten away either domestic or foreign entrepreneurs.

5. And finally the most impressive evidence of pragmatism is Mexico's announced policy with respect to the new petroleum discoveries in the south. When the Mexican government discovered that the US trade bill for 1975 contained punitive clauses for nations that joined OPEC, Mexico vehemently protested, but did not join OPEC, but announced that it would sell its petroleum at OPEC prices. Further when some US officials stated that the new Mexican discoveries would be the solution to the US energy crisis, Mexico announced that the oil would be produced in terms of Mexico's, not the US's best interest.

My own views on the new approaches to Latin America and to other parts of the Third World, SELA, and the Charter are that these are symbolic and rhetorical gestures that will have little impact on reality. However, I would like to pose to Professor Sepulveda some concrete questions in view of some of Mexico's broad policy positions and recent behavior patterns.

1. What is the Mexican government's general position on US military and police equipment and training programs for Latin America?

2. How does Mexico view questions of security and world peace and order? Is the Rio Treaty of any utility? What actions might Mexico take to help preserve peace in the Western Hemisphere? Would Mexico supply troops for peace keeping operations under any circumstances?

3. What are Mexican government officials planning with respect to the migration of Mexican national to the US?

4. What do Mexicans expect as the short term results of the new laws of foreign investment and technology transfer? How much is really changed by the new laws or are they primarily a codification of former practices? What are the costs

of implementing these new laws; what benefits will be derived?

5. Have Mexican government officials considered the possibility of eventually cutting off all new foreign investment and simply purchasing complete plants and contracting for managerial help and worker training? If so, in what time frame? With what kinds of financing? What are the costs and benefits?

6. The Mexican government has demonstrated great concern over trade imbalances. What kinds of legislation are being contemplated to ease the payments problems? What leverage does Mexico have with her trading partners? Will petroleum be exported at OPEC prices to ease the trade imbalances?

7. Does Mexico have a position on commodity agreements such as sugar and coffee?

*Material in brackets [] was included in my original notes but was cut from the oral presentation at the conference.

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